

## UNTAPPED

# TRANSFORMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

For more information, read the full report: *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*

## Teacher Leadership Training That Works

Across the education field, there is unusual consensus that strong teacher leaders are key to improving our nation's schools. Unfortunately, clear expectations for what teacher leaders should do, and strategies to prepare them to do it, are few and far between. A recent survey found that while 86 percent of urban school districts have teacher leader roles, only 32 percent offered specialized training for teachers stepping into those roles.<sup>1</sup>

Assigning teachers to leadership roles without training does a double disservice: It takes teaching time away from the educators best prepared to accelerate student learning, and then fails to equip them with the skills they need to lead colleagues to similar success.

The neglected state of teacher leaders is regrettable because we know that with the right support, they can immediately boost academic performance in their schools. Data from the first two years of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)—a program that provides job-embedded training and coaching to teacher leaders—indicate that even while still in training, almost three quarters of participants were able to increase student learning across the classrooms they supervised.

Strong and effective teacher leaders who can guide their colleagues to success should be central to any school improvement strategy, but to fulfill their potential, they must receive purposeful training in skills that directly contribute to meaningful academic gains for students.

### Here are six design elements that should inform the structure and delivery of teacher leadership training programs:

#### 1. Maintain a sharp focus on instructional leadership.

- Make instructional expertise a primary selection criterion, and prioritize developing participants' instructional leadership skills, particularly their ability to lead a team of teachers to meet the challenges of new, more rigorous standards.

#### 2. Maximize opportunities for real-world practice.

- Ensure that participants are able to practice leadership skills in their schools and that leadership responsibilities and development activities directly address existing gaps in the school's leadership capacity.
- Secure principal buy-in before program launch to ensure teachers have time and support to enact job-embedded assignments and activities.

#### 3. Provide personalized feedback from well-trained experts.

- Program instructors should have deep content knowledge, a strong track record leading school improvement efforts, and contextual knowledge about the city, district, or charter management organization in which the aspiring teacher leaders work.

#### 4. Capitalize on technology.

- Use recorded webinars to efficiently deliver "traditional" course content, allowing instructors to dedicate more time and resources to job-embedded learning and coaching.
- Use video to capture leadership activities in real time, enabling participants to see themselves in action while getting feedback from instructors and peers.

#### 5. Emphasize key skills that translate into student gains.

- In addition to instructional leadership, emphasize skills that meaningfully contribute to school improvement, such as adult leadership, data-driven instruction, and fostering collaborative cultures.

#### 6. Provide multiple points of entry into teacher leadership trajectories.

- Provide targeted development opportunities that are differentiated to teachers' skill level and career ambitions, whether they aspire to the principalship or plan to remain in the classroom.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Great City Schools. (2015, April.) Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's Great City Schools. Presented at the Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative Convening, New York, NY.